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PRESS RELEASE
ON
THE MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

The Ministers of Agriculture of the Member States of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) held their first ever meeting in Moscow, on 7 October 2011.

During the meeting which was chaired by H.E. Ms. Elena SKRYNNIK, Minister of Agriculture of the Russian Federation, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations delivered general statements, assessed the cooperation in the field of agriculture and agro-industry in the region and discussed potential mechanisms for further strengthening this cooperation.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a joint declaration was adopted which constitutes an ambitious road map to further enhance cooperation in the agricultural field. In the adopted document, the Ministers agreed to intensify joint efforts to promote cooperation in order to help reduce regional disparities and to give impetus to regional trade in agricultural products. Cooperation in vine-growing and wine-making sectors, are also envisaged in the joint declaration.

Another important part of the declaration is the decision of the Ministers to review the opportunities for the simplification of export and import procedures for agricultural products among the BSEC Member States, which can be a crucial factor for the transport of fresh fruits and vegetables where delays can easily lead to the decay and spoiling of the goods.

Furthermore, the document anticipates cooperation among the Member States' national genetic banks of plants in order to secure biodiversity and also exchange expertise and best practices among agrarian research and education institutions.

The declaration puts emphasis on cooperation among the veterinary, phyto-sanitary and plant quarantine services of the Member States. Consultations to harmonize the labelling standards for food products, as an important part of food quality and food safety, are also anticipated in the joint declaration.

Before the adoption of the joint declaration by the Ministers of Agriculture, the Organization mainly focused on cooperation and exchange of information and experience in the area of food safety within the framework of its Working Group on Agriculture and Agro-Industry established in 1993. In this context, ongoing cooperation between BSEC and FAO is expected to result in a joint pilot project on promoting risk assessment of food hazards at the country level. Up to now, two BSEC Project Development Fund projects

related to agriculture have been implemented with the participation of private and public institutions from six Member States.

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BSEC was launched on 25 June 1992 at the Istanbul Summit, at a time when regional cooperation was most needed in the transformation process that the countries of the region were undergoing. The idea that stronger economic cooperation among the Black Sea countries would enhance peace and stability in the region was the underlying philosophy behind BSEC. Today, BSEC serves as a forum for cooperation in a wide range of areas and a platform for political dialogue for its 12 Member States.[1]

[1] The 12 BSEC Member States are comprised of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.